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ABSTRACT

This paper explores the current situation of universities in Korea in an era of reform. University reform was initiated by the government in the 1980s and brought to the universities in the 1990s. In the interval, there have been many social, economic, and political changes in Korean society. The current approach to university reform in Korea needs to be reviewed in terms of its ideology, methods, and agencies to reflect the fundamental changes in its contingencies. There appears to be a "paradigmatic gap" between the government and the universities. Laws regulating higher education in Korea should be rewritten, and the notion that accountability to society is the rationale for government control of the universities should be reinterpreted. Education reform is a never-ending story, and it may be that a deregulation of the current mode of deregulation is likely to be the theme for reform in the 21st century. (Contains 16 references.) (SLD)

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Background of the Reform

It becomes almost a *cliche* to point out the poor quality of university education compared to the outstanding growth in quantitative terms(MOE, 2000a; KCUE, 2000; OECD, 2000). Several factors have contributed to such a discrepancy between the quality and the quantity in university education. Let's look into the quantitative aspect first. The government's education policy has been popularizing the higher education. Historically, the elitist higher education system imposed by the Japanese occupation government until 1945 was dismantled by the strong demand of Korean people. Also, the American style universities replaced the European ones under the influence of the U.S. military government during 1945-1948. In the new nation liberated from the *ancient regime* of Confucian class structure and the colonial oppression, education is believed to be one of the most effective means of social mobility and economic success of an individual. Arguably, cultural factors like self-esteem, family pressure, and respect for literati also has contributed to the expansion of universities(Adams & Gottlieb, 1993; Sorensen, 1994; Robinson, 1994).

In the qualitative aspect, several reasons hinder the universities from keeping pace with the quantitative expansion(KEDI, 1996: 145-186). Most of all, the lack of resources both in materials and qualified personnel has resulted in poor facilities, research and teaching. Particularly, in science and engineering that require more material investment than liberal art, humanities and social studies reveals a wider gap between the quantity and the quality. Also, the lack of competition among professors and researchers and students as well has kept the level of academic achievement at a low level compared to other countries where the tenure system is established. The quality control mechanism such as the accreditation system is only at the beginning stage. The Korean Council for University Education started a rudimentary evaluation of the quality of departments and schools in 1992. Moreover, the governance structure of universities, public and private, within and without, is centralized with bureaucratic control that impedes individual initiatives. Finally, the student culture formerly ridden by radical political activism for democratization movement and now the mass

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consumerism dilutes the emphasis on academic activities. Those fatigued winners who have endured the ordeal of university entrance exams seem to deserve the right to get away from books and tests in the campuses surrounded by all sorts of amusement stores such as restaurants, pubs, game rooms, and boutique shops.

Since the early nineties the problems of university education have been loomed large as the trend of globalization and its threats to Korean economy became apparent. Accordingly, reinforcement of national competitiveness in globalized market is emphasized in major policy areas including education. In this respect, education reform in Korea is explicitly geared to building the national economic competitiveness(PCER, 1996: 1-14). Universities are asked to provide knowledge, technologies, and competent manpower for the businesses and industries struggling in the global market. Such a demand looks imperative and urgent as well, since transfer of sophisticated technology from advanced countries becomes difficult and the late starters of Asia and Latin America are catching up with Korean economy in the international competition.

The initiative for university reform began with government's lead. Let alone the public universities(national in Korea in the sense that funding and regulations come from the national government), the private universities should also follow the direction suggested by the government. The government subsidy to private universities is quite low in proportion to their total expenditure of 3 trillion won, comprising only 2.5 percent of the amount(KEDI, 1996:180). Nevertheless, the legal systems and bureaucratic practices for the control of the private sector in education allow government's voice heard loud in private universities. Also, it seems that the dire need of any form of financial supports in private universities makes them docile to the government who reserves some funds at its discretion to hand out. Perhaps, universities themselves who have been unable to secure high quality education and management have invited the government intervention.

Major Reforms for University Education

It was the Presidential Commission for Education Reform created in February 1994 under the former President Young Sam Kim that forged out the ideas and principles for the policies to reform university education. In a sense, the Commission synthesized the previous suggestions since 1985 when the first Presidential advisory committee for education reform was formed. The current government of President Kim Dae-jung decided to take over the proposals for education reform made by its predecessor, judging that no further ideas would be necessary. That enough talk has been done and it is time to act was the guideline of the Ministry of Education in 1998 led by Hae Chan Lee whom the President chose for his ability proven in handling ambitious plans(MOE, 1999). It seemed that those ideas discussed since the eighties found its way to be realized. Seven representative measures of university reform are briefly described

below(MOE, 1998:22-32).

more diversification and autonomy in academic affairs

In order to facilitate interdisciplinary learning as well as to allow more choice to students the departments were reshuffled to larger units based on their similarities as academic disciplines. In principle, students are no longer required to belong to a particular department, while professors still belong to their respective departments. Along with this, multiple major programs are introduced by reducing the minimum core credit. Student can earn up to 3 majors in undergraduate program. Also, universities are allowed to notify, instead of being approved, of the changes in their charters regarding basic organization, duration of school years, curriculum, degrees offered, and student activities to the Ministry of Education.

entrusting enrollment quota allocation to schools

The government controls the enrollment quota to prevent an excessive growth in university population. The government believes that unfettered growth in higher education would distort the manpower supply and inevitably degrade the quality of education. Particularly, the institutions located in the Metropolitan Seoul Perimeter are regulated with special attention in order to control the concentration of population in the urban area. However, owing to the reform those universities who meet the criteria such as student professor ratio and facilities will be allowed to determine their own size of student enrollment. Particularly, private universities located outside of the Metropolitan Seoul Perimeter and the evening programs of graduate schools in the Metropolitan Seoul Perimeter are free to determine the size of enrollment on condition that they should meet the minimum criteria to provide desirable educational environment. In 1996 the Ministry of Education began to allocate the quota in lump sum to entrust universities to reallocate it according to their needs.

abolition of the approval for founding a university

Formerly the Ministry of Education retained the authority to approve or reject the application for establishing a university, taking various factors into consideration ranging from educational to socio-economic and political purposes. Since the demand always exceeds the supply, there has been a constant pressure to build more universities. With the abolition of the approval system(mainly outside of the Metropolitan Seoul Perimeter) those who satisfy certain criteria such as buildings and spaces, faculties, and finances are allowed to establish colleges and universities. As a result, the number of universities increased rapidly in the provinces. This open door policy also gave rise to small-scale colleges and graduate schools with specific emphasis on some fields such as design and information and communication technology.

innovation of personnel management for faculty members

The so-called faculty in breeding will be regulated by mandate. Also, employing faculty members by contract, rather than hiring virtually lifelong, is strongly recommended. Reward system such as annual salary will be introduced in 2002. Professors of foreign nationalities in public universities will be treated on a same basis with their domestic colleagues. The equal treatment is expected to facilitate the import of qualified foreign scholars to stimulate their Korean counterparts. Further, the Ministry of Education suggests that the current practice of election held by faculty members to select their president should be improved in order to evade too much politicizing the campuses.

categorization of colleges and universities

In order to "restructure the inefficient national university system" the government is supposed to introduce a classification system that categorizes research oriented universities and instruction oriented ones. It is frequently pointed out that majority of Korean universities assimilate each other in their characteristics. In the proposed classification system, each university will be treated differently in various policy measures including subsidies according to their types. Also, the local universities will be given a special consideration, mainly in financial aid to their engineering programs, in order to maintain regional balances and support local autonomy, particularly between the Metropolitan Seoul and the other provinces.

financial reward by evaluation of performance

Universities are required to specialize in certain academic field, for instance, basic sciences, particular field of engineering, internationalization, and etc. And financial methods are used to induce the universities to the chosen directions of diversification and specialization. For instance, funds are earmarked in the national budge to encourage those universities who faithfully follow the education reform principles. Also, there are provisions of matching funds to universities' own efforts to garner monetary supports. And all of the 24 national universities are strongly recommended to obtain some management advice from the consulting firms for commercial businesses in order to improve their performances.

The Brain Korea 21 Project

This unprecedented and ambitious project aims at building research capabilities in selected universities with a concentration of financial subsidy. The Brain Korea 21 purports to foster manpower for advanced research, for instance, research assistants and contract professors, in selected disciplines mainly in science and engineering. In principle, the concentration of funding was to guide the screening of the applications gathered throughout the nation. However, there had to be some spread of the fund to nullify those excluded from the Project, such as liberal arts, humanities, and social

sciences. An extra budget of 1,400 billion won(approximately more than one billion in US dollar) in the national budget account will be prepared over the 7 year period from 1999. The recipient universities in turn should make promises to improve the schools, for instance, reducing the size of the undergraduate programs, abolishing the department system, hiring more faculty members, and so forth(MOE, 2000b).

Analysis of the Reform : Ideology, Methods, Agencies, and Contingencies

Once the reform suggestions are put into action by preparing the necessary funds, revising the laws and Presidential decrees, and creating friendly public opinions, universities and professors begin to express their opinions and interests. All of the seven reforms described above, except the entrusting of enrollment quota allocation, have provoked serious oppositions. Some are opposed to them, as the changes hit them hard in their status, security, and fame.

The abolition of departmental partition has caused a "flight" of students to several lucrative fields such as law, business administration, English language, and computer related studies, threatening the existence of "non-popular" departments. The rapid increase in the number of universities, particularly in local areas, has caused a problem of lower student enrollment that brings about financial crisis in some schools. The employment contract based on individual performance is a direct threat to the job security of professors. The restructuring of national universities means an extinction of certain departments or activities as the emphasis shifts between research and teaching. The funding by performance or capability, as shown in the Brain Korea 21 Project, tends to perpetuate an exclusion of the unprivileged.

Certainly, the reform proposals have split the faculty society into those who are benefited and those who are not. However, under the surface of the interest conflicts there are some features of the reform led by the government that intensify the dissent from the universities. In following pages, those problematic features contained in the current university reform are reviewed in respect to its ideology, method, agencies, and contingencies.

ideology

Those professors who explicitly criticize the university reform label it as "neo-liberalism." Their critique goes like this: the neo liberal education reform undermines the community of professors by exacerbating inequalities and competition among them; the jeopardized disciplines of liberal arts and humanities should be protected from the whims of the market; the emphasis on material values and reward and punishment subjugate the universities to the government who controls the money; the autonomy of university and the freedom of academia will be lost as the result of neo-liberal reform(Oh My News, Oct. 23, 2001). In a nutshell, the university is not the right place

that could be governed by market principles.

The Ministry of Education never advocates the term "neo-liberal" in any of its official documents of reform policies, although its reform policies pretty much smack of it. Instead, the Ministry tries to ignore the accusation, judging that any response to such an ideological issue may lead to an endless and futile dispute with the opponents. On the other hand, the officials at the Ministry of Education regard the debate on neo-liberalism as somewhat outdated having reached its peak in the eighties and early nineties. Now, how to survive in the globalized world market seems to dictate the Ministry's views and course of action. In this respect, by emphasizing competitive edge, the government deliberately evades the ideological attack. It seems that the Ministry of Education takes a pragmatic stance by showing "no denial, no acceptance."

In the parallel between the emphases on competitive edge and communitarian autonomy there is not much room for communication. In a sense the ideological attack on neo-liberalism works as "rallying around the flag," as the reform measures show a dual characteristics that confuses the interpretation of the consequences of reform. For instance, the Ministry of Education argues that the reform of universities will allow more autonomy and higher quality, while the professors see them in quite an opposite direction. Also, the growing awareness of the ills of the market oriented globalization, such as widening poverty gaps among countries and individuals as well, renders support to blaming the neo-liberalism as the causes of evil. Anti-neoliberalism became a powerful catchword to organize the protests and mobilize the resources against the government led reform.

On the other hand, although the Ministry of Education neither officially accepts nor denies the neo-liberal characteristic of the reform suggestions, these are apparently baptized by such concepts as competition and efficiency, reward and punishment, and consumer sovereignty, all familiar to market(Park, 1995). Moreover, the ideas of university reform were incepted in the eighties when Thatcherism was attractive to reformers. However, one striking difference between the market autonomy and the kind of autonomy that Ministry of Education relishes is that the government still intervenes in its working. In higher education sector, the government monopolizes the provision of funds through the national budget. In this respect, the government is by no means an "invisible hand," rather, it is quite visible in its capacity and intention to coordinate the universities.

Therefore, the accusation of the reform as neo-liberalism is not quite correct, at least in the sense that the government still retains strong control power. At best, the accusation may be half a truth. On the other side, the government's silence on the ideological aspect of the reform is rather irresponsible, in that such an ambiguity may cause confusions and inconsistency in implementing and evaluating the reform programs. Moreover, such an ambivalence of the Ministry of Education is likely to impede the communication and compromises between the related parties, thus,

undermining the trust on the coherence of government policies.

methods

As briefly mentioned above, the Ministry of Education relies on material incentives to impose its reform. There are other methods for its voice to be heard. One is the series of laws regulating the higher education and its constituencies, and the other is the bureaucratic control mechanisms based on the laws and practices that have been forged over a long period of paternalism that regards education as national as well as public affairs.

There are three major laws related to higher education: The Higher Education Act, The Public Educational Employee Act, and The Private Schools Act. The laws and its Presidential decrees and ministerial orders provide the universities with every detail of the standards and criteria for managing the schools. On the positive side, these rules and regulations solve the conflicts and clarify the cases in dispute. On the negative side, they suffocate initiatives and discourage creative suggestions in the name of equity, impartiality, or preventing frauds. Rather than supporting any new moves in universities, the current legal system tends to oppress them.

What makes things worse is that there are blind spots or loopholes in spite of the tightness of the education laws. Hiding from the eyes of the officials, some "illegal" activities thrive producing their own educational outcomes. Government officials have to spend considerable time and energy to detect and punish such illegalities. People in the universities often deplore the lack of autonomy with little awareness of its legal origin. On the contrary, bureaucrats are well aware of the importance of laws as the source of their control. However, one thing becomes more evident that the Korean higher education has outgrown in its diversity the system of regulatory laws and its peripherals. It seems that sooner or later the government will reach on the crossroad of rewriting the higher education related laws either in the direction of reinforcing the control or giving it up.

The interventionist legal system and the funding by performance are likely to trespass on the realm of autonomy, unless there should be thoughtful cares and dexterity of the government side. On the other hand, in the universities there should be more sharing of understanding why and how the government works in certain ways. In this regard, there should be more communication between the government and the opponents, however difficult it may be.

agencies

The Ministry of Education, The Ministry of Planning and Budget, The Ministry of Finance and Economy, and the educational research institutes such as Korean Educational Development Institute, and professors participating in the planning of the reform are the known agencies of university reform. The Presidential Office works

behind the scene. And the Congress is rather following the administrative than leading the reform, though its explicit and implicit power whether to sanction a reform program or not is almost absolute.

Needless to say, the Ministry of Education is the prime actor for the reform. Currently, less than 50 staffs in the Bureau of Higher Education are handling the entire universities of the nation except vocational colleges and teacher's universities. Since the education reform was launched in the mid nineties, the works have been multiplied. Unfortunately, in the same period the number of staffs was reduced due to "restructuring for small government," definitely one of the trademarks of "neo-liberalism." The Bureau of H.E. is extremely overloaded which turns out to be burn-outs and frequent shifts of the staffs and unsatisfactory quality of works. Moreover, the jobs prescribed by the regulatory laws and decrees simply exceed the capacity of the limited numbers of staffs. One solution is to left undone some of its works, thus allowing "autonomy" to the schools.

On the other hand, the Ministry of Education is under a constant pressure from other ministries that have the budgetary power and the overall control of policy coordination of the government. Those ministries in charge of the economy and their affiliated research groups, such as the Korea Development Institute, are more tilted toward prescribing market solutions to the problems in education sector(KDI, Feb., 2001). The Ministry of Education often tries to mitigate the "neo-liberal" demands from other governmental bodies. However, the Ministry of Education is squeezed and has to put up with the blame from the schools accusing "neo-liberal" reforms. In this regard, there seems to be a common ground between the Ministry of Education and universities to be allied against the others.

The government related research institutes of all sorts and those professors who give advice for the reforms are overwhelmingly lopsided to Anglo-American trends. Most of them as well as the government officials in important positions are trained at the graduate schools in the U.S. or the Great Britain. In spite of their efforts to take into consideration the endogenous factors their theories and perspectives of reform are heavily influenced by what is going on in the U.S., particularly in higher education which they had experienced. In an aspect, the standards of the rights and duties of American universities become the same reference to both the government and its opponents.

contingencies

As seen above, the university education reform was incubated in the eighties and born to the schools in the late nineties. In the meantime, there have been significant changes in Korean society and international environments. The political democratization in the nineties has created a totally different policy environment compared to that of the developmental era since the sixties. News media, powerful interest groups, non-

governmental organizations, and the bi-partisan Congress exert their own influences on government's decision making. The government officials' reputation as competent decision-makers has been eroded, as there appears a plethora of criticism almost everyday on the policies that fail in reconciling the interest conflicts.

In the international sphere, the fall of the socialist countries was deemed as to prove the superiority of market to the planning by government authorities. Most of all, the economic crisis in 1997 triggered by the foreign currency deficit was attributed to a large extent to a government failure, that is, the failure of the state-led interventionist policies. The Korean government has to make an endeavor to re-institute the market mechanism in order to replace government interventionism. Restructuring has become a buzzword to upgrade the efficiency of the public sector, to say nothing of the private sectors such as firms, banks, and labor unions. It seems that the government cannot possibly attempt any reforms without help from those actors who have stakes on the reform. In this vein the education reform should also obtain consents from the related parties. Without the consent the implementation is quite likely to be hampered by resistance, adversary public opinion, or sheer physical demonstration.

As the global economy takes on the feature of knowledge based economy, the weight seems to have shifted to knowledge from capital and labor in government policies. Knowledge is said to become one of the prime sources of income to nations and individuals(World Bank, 2001). And when it comes to the issue of knowledge, universities and professor have much to say as they think they are the largest reservoir of knowledge. It is apparent in any sense that the creation of knowledge for 21st century and the mandarin regulation of universities are incompatible. Moreover, the relativist perspective on knowledge and epistemology raises a philosophical issue on the control of university by the government bureaucracy. In other words, the bureaucratic rationality based on modernity for managing any institution efficiently seems to be unfit to knowledge creation of post-modernity.

Likewise, the contingencies of education reform have been changed. It is also likely that the changes will continue and at a much faster pace than before. Now, the university reform policy has to accommodate such changes in the policy environment.

Implications and Concluding Remarks

The current university reform needs to be revised in terms of its ideology, methods, and agencies, reflecting the fundamental changes in its contingencies. It seems that there appears a "paradigmatic gap" between the government and the university, since the contingencies of reform in society have been changed. First of all, the ideology of university reform has to be articulated, regarding when, where, and to what the "neo-liberal" twists should be given. It is a crude way to handle the universities and the community of professors as if they are one entity. Secondly, the current methods of

reform seem to be too much traditional and, unfortunately, outworn. The Ministry of Education should be "steering rather than rowing" in planning and implementing the reform programs(Osborne & Gaebler, 1993:25-48). For this purpose, the laws regulating the higher education need to be re-written from a zero base. Thirdly, the cherished notion of "accountability to society" as the sole rationale for the government to control the universities that is shared inside the circle of planning officials should be re-interpreted. The Ministry of Education can neither take up all the accountability of universities to society nor arbitrate it between the two. With an articulated ideology and methods of reform, the Ministry of Education could be able to cope with the other governmental bodies with a firm stance.

Probably, the education reform is a never-ending story. In a sense, since 1945 a series of education reforms with varying emphases have been taking place. For instance, the first Republic of President Seung Man Rhee adopted American model of educational systems, in the sixties and thereafter the military governments of Chung Hee Park and his successors introduced a strong control of education, and President Young Sam Kim rode the tide of "neo-liberalism" in the nineties. This time, the extended version of the former President Young Sam Kim's university reform plausibly emphasizes deregulation and autonomy. Nevertheless, as seen above, the deregulation seems to have some serious limits and fundamental flaws. A deregulation of the current mode of deregulation is likely to be the theme for the reform in 21st century. ©

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